

ON PRATINCOLA SALAX VERR. AND ALLIED SPECIES.

BY WITMER STONE.

While engaged in studying the Pratincolas in the Academy's collection, I observed a specimen bearing Verreaux's printed label marked as the type of *Pratincola salax* Verr.* A comparison of this specimen with the description of *P. salax* in Sharpe's Catalogue of the Birds in the British Museum (Vol iv, p. 184), and with the original description (Rev. et. Mag. de Zoöl. 1851, p. 307), led to some interesting results.

P. salax of Sharpe's Catalogue is evidently one of the *P. rubetra* group, with a light-colored throat, while the type specimen now before me belongs to the *P. rubicola* group, with the throat uniformly black, and seems to be identical with *P. sybilla* from Madagascar.

It is curious that the bird described by Sharpe should have been referred to *P. salax* of Verreaux, as the original description distinctly refers to a black-throated bird. Verreaux first describes the bird as black—and then enumerates the parts which are differently colored (“Nigerrima; uropygio, collari interrupto, macula alarum magna interna, abdomine albis; pectore castaneo.”) As no special mention is made of the throat it is certainly understood to be black. The more minute description following the Latin diagnosis agrees precisely with the specimen before me, placing its authenticity beyond a doubt.

Verreaux's bird is from the Gaboon, and with the exception of some specimens collected by Du Chaillu at Cape Lopez and River Camma (Cassin, Proc. Phil. Acad., 1859, p. 39) is the only black-throated specimen recorded from this part of Africa. I cannot say whether or not Cassin's determination of these birds was correct, as a careful search through the Academy's collection has failed to discover Du Chaillu's specimens.

The type specimen seems identical both in size and coloration with one of *P. sybilla* from Madagascar and differs from the south African form, *P. torquata*, in its smaller size, narrower bill, and in the chestnut color being confined to the fore part of the breast.

*This bird (No. 722 Acad. Catalogue) together with several others of Verreaux's types, was purchased by Dr. Thos. B. Wilson and presented to the Academy with the rest of the Wilson collection.

P. axillaris Shelly (Proc. Zoöl. Soc., 1884, p. 556), from Mt. Kilimanjaro, seems closely allied to *P. sybilla*, but differs from it in its larger size, black axillaries, and in the diminution of the white on the inner edge of the secondaries beneath.

It may be that a series of Gaboon specimens may show some distinctive race characters, but certainly the form does not differ specifically from the Madagascar bird, and perhaps *P. axillaris* may fall under the same head.

In that case *P. sybilla* would be considered as ranging across all central Africa, *P. salax* representing the western race, typical *P. sybilla* the Madagascar race and *P. axillaris* a mountain form of the same; while on the south the species would be replaced by *P. torquata*.

All the species just mentioned including the white-tailed species *P. hemprichii*, may be distinguished from the group consisting of *P. rubicola*, *P. maura* and *P. leucura*, by the color of the breast in the males which in the former is dark chestnut and in the latter lighter, orange rufous.

This difference in coloration of the breast seems to correspond with the geographical distribution, the lighter forms being found in Europe and Asia, while the darker are confined to Africa.

The identification of *P. salax* Verr. with *P. sybilla* Linn., leaves the bird described as *P. salax* in Sharpe's catalogue without a name. Although the species is apparently distinct from any described form, nevertheless, as there are no specimens in the Academy collection, and as I have never had an opportunity of examining any, I hesitate to propose a name for it and thereby, perhaps, add to the already complicated synonymy of the genus. The species forming the *P. rubicola* group to which *P. sybilla* belongs may be arranged as follows:

Eur. Asiatic Group. Breast orange rufous:—

No white visible on the tail.

P. rubicola (Linn.)

Europe and Western Asia.

P. maura (Pall) (= *P. indica*, Blyth.)

Asia; range coalescing with that of the former somewhere in the water shed of the Volga (Sharpe.) Several geographical races of this species have been described, but do not seem worthy of specific rank.

Basal portion of tail white for two-thirds of its length.

P. leucura Blyth.

India and Burmese countries.

African group. Breast dark chestnut:—

No white visible on the tail.

P. sybilla (L.) (= *P. salax* Verr.)

Madagascar and Gaboon, perhaps extending across central Africa and exhibiting several geographical races of which the following may be one:

P. axillaris Shelly.

Kilimanjaro.

P. torquata (L.) (= *P. pastor* Voigt.)

South Africa.

Basal portion of the tail white.

P. hemprichii (Ehreb.)

N. E. Africa, ranging into S. E. Europe (Severtzoff). Of course the two white-tailed species are closely related, and are separated here merely to carry out the geographical division.